

King County Initiative 24: Easy Citizen Involvement

Dick Spady, President. John & Jim Spady, Vice Presidents.

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TESTIMONY OF DICK SPADY

To the King County Council's Committee of the Whole Tuesday Morning, September 4, 2007

Good morning. My name is Dick Spady. I am a co-founder of *Dick's Drive-In Restaurants* in Seattle and the author and proponent of King County Initiative 24: *Easy Citizen Involvement*, also known as the "Citizen Councilor" Initiative. The goal of I-24 is to make participating in the public hearing process as easy as having friends and neighbors over for coffee.

In 1968 I enrolled in the Graduate School of Business at the University of Washington and began researching ways to make it easier for people to participate more effectively in large organizations, including governments. My research led me to conclude that big meetings are the "Achilles' Heal" of our democracy. Most people aren't comfortable speaking at a big meeting, and even if they are, it's just too inconvenient to attend a big meeting held at only one place and one time. As a result, even on "hot button" issues, the vast majority of citizens are so frustrated by the process that they simply don't attend public hearings.

If enacted into law by the King County Council, I-24 would complement the traditional public hearing process by encouraging interested citizens to volunteer as official "citizen councilors." These volunteers would meet periodically in networked small groups, at times and places convenient to them, during a 30-day "participation window." During each round of the process, each small group could review summaries of key facts and different possible solutions, share individual opinions verbally within the small group, but also share their opinions with all of the other participants, by responding to a detailed written survey, with all results posted on the Internet.

The process proposed by I-24 will be administered by volunteers, funded entirely with voluntary donations, and overseen by the county auditor. The auditor must consider the advice of a broad-based steering committee (composed of key public officials or their representatives). Our goal is to ensure that the entire process is widely viewed as transparent, fair, accurate and even-handed.

Although we were surprised to learn late Friday afternoon that the Council Staff is estimating that it will cost the County \$130,000/year to oversee a program that will cost only an estimated \$20,000/year to operate, we are committed to funding I-24 with donations and not taxes. Thus, if the Council directly enacts I-24, my company – *Dick's Drive-In Restaurants* – will guarantee sufficient donations to cover the staff's estimated oversight costs for two years, as well as redirect the \$50,000 we would have spent on a political campaign for I-24 to the program's operating costs.

For more information, please visit EasyCitizenInvolvement.com. My sons and I will be happy to answer your questions. Thank you.

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TESTIMONY OF JIM SPADY

To the King County Council's Committee of the Whole; Tuesday Morning, September 4, 2007

Good morning. I'm Jim Spady, the campaign manager for Initiative 24. I was disappointed to learn Thursday afternoon that the only proposal about I-24 on today's agenda would be proposed ordinance 2007-0438, which would send I-24 to the voters before first considering its merits. Proposed Ordinance 2007-0437, which would allow the Council to consider I-24 on the merits, is not on today's agenda. With all due respect, I believe that this is procedurally premature, for two reasons: fairness and format.

My first argument is based on fairness. By June 20th over 80,000 petition signatures had been filed in support of I-24. Although we have tried since then to set up meetings with each of the Councilmembers, several members have declined to meet with us because they wanted to read the staff report first. Unfortunately, the five-page staff report wasn't published until last Friday, the Friday before Labor Day Weekend, at 4:30 in the afternoon. As a result, we have not had an opportunity to meet with several Councilmembers before today. This is unfair.

My second argument is based on format: the plain language of every County petition. Every I-24 petition was in the format required by County law, which is different than state law. The County's required format includes a form letter from each citizen to the King County Council. This required form letter includes specific language, which I have highlighted in the copies of the I-24 petition that I have brought for your personal review. These are the key words:

[QUOTE] “We the undersigned citizens of King County . . . respectfully request that this petition . . . be transmitted to the King County Council, and we respectfully petition the Council to enact said measure into law; and if not enacted . . . then to be placed on the ballot” [UNQUOTE]

I respectfully suggest that the Council has put the cart before the horse by taking up proposed ordinance 0438 before ordinance 0437. The initiative process specified by King County's Charter and related ordinances clearly and plainly directs the Council to decide whether a proposed initiative is worthy of enactment before deciding to send it to the voters.

In summary, on behalf of the over 80,000 people who signed I-24 petitions, I respectfully ask this Committee and the Council to either table or reject Ordinance 2007-0438, the only proposed ordinance on today's agenda. I also ask that this Committee or the Council bring up proposed Ordinance 2007-0437 for a vote as soon as possible. I strongly believe that if the Council votes on I-24 on the merits, I-24 will become law and, more importantly, become King County's most successful, and least expensive, citizen outreach program. Thank you.

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TESTIMONY OF JOHN SPADY

To the King County Council's Committee of the Whole; Tuesday Morning, September 4, 2007

Good morning councilmembers. My name is John Spady. I work at *Dick's* Drive-In Restaurants and I am the Executive Vice President and Director of Research for the Forum Foundation. I am a member of both the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation and the International Association for Public Participation.

Dick Spady, the man, like all people everywhere, is more than the label we identify them with. My father, like a lot of fathers, served his country when he was needed... first in World War II as a Seabee in the Navy, then later in Korea as a commissary officer in Japan. The first taught him how to build infrastructure, while the second taught him all about moving food. Both of these skills would come in handy when he and his partners decided to open the first Dick's Drive-In Restaurant in 1954.

According to Wikipedia, one of the unofficial mottos of the Seabee's was: "With willing hearts and skillful hands, the difficult we do at once, the impossible takes a bit longer — miracles by appointment only."

It has been a seemingly impossible task at times for my father to try and build something as simple and straightforward, to improve civil society, by asking people to simply listen to one another in a deep and respectful way. But this initiative, this Citizen Councilor initiative, is the culmination of many years of knocking on many political doors.

Some of those doors have been welcoming. The City of Redmond, for many years in the early 1990s, communicated with its citizens using a model very similar to Initiative 24. And for a time, the model thrived. But, because it was never an ordinance – never protected by statute – the Redmond Community Forum succumbed to the inevitable political battles of its day. But make no mistake, that Forum, while it lasted, proved to be very helpful for both the city and its citizens.

So, now, my father is back — along with the support of over 80,000 citizens of King County — to ask you, like the Seabee's of World War II, to immediately do what is "only difficult" but not impossible. Enact Initiative 24 immediately.

Thank you.